Sustainable Reuse—Ensuring that a Brownfield's Reuse Offers the Greatest Social, Economic, and Environmental Benefit to the Community

EPA's Brownfields Program is designed to empower states, communities, and other stakeholders in economic redevelopment to work together in a timely manner to prevent, assess, safely clean up, and sustainably reuse brownfields. A brownfield is a property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant. EPA's Brownfields Program provides financial and technical assistance for brownfield revitalization, including grants for environmental assessment, cleanup, and job training.

The Value of Sustainable Development

In the years prior to EPA's Brownfields Program, communities dealt with a steady loss of greenspace as land development crept further outward from the urban core. Along with that sprawl came the proliferation of abandoned commercial and industrial sites as well as declines in urban investment, property taxes, and employment opportunities for city residents. Communities across the country were negatively affected by these trends in sprawling development.

While EPA's Brownfields Program has proven success in returning sites to use, having assessed more than 4,300 properties and leveraged more than $5 billion in redevelopment funding, the Program has also made sustainable development one of its primary goals. In the context of restoring brownfields, sustainable development does not refer solely to removing potentially hazardous contamination and getting a new business located on the property. Ultimately, sustainable development means finding an approach to brownfields reuse that offers the most significant long-term benefits to the local community, taking into account environmental, economic, and other quality-of-life measures.

Empowering the Community and Benefitting Local Residents

In 1990, Bridgeport, Connecticut, had become one of the poorest and most highly taxed cities in the nation, with an estimated 400 brownfields detracting from the lives of the city's residents. No one suffered from this bleak situation more than the nearly 39,000 residents of Bridgeport's impoverished West End, an area rife with former industrial sites. But today, through the efforts of the community and assistance from an EPA Brownfields Pilot grant, West End residents enjoy a variety of recreational opportunities on what used to be one of those blighted properties.

One of West End's brownfields, Went Field, was once the site of Barnum Circus' winter quarters and was used to house a variety of circus animals.

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New recreational space on Bridgeport, Connecticut's former Went Field site.

JUST THE FACTS:

- Ultimately, sustainable development means finding an approach to brownfields reuse that offers the most significant long-term benefits to the local community, taking into account environmental, economic, and other quality-of-life measures.
- In one of Bridgeport, Connecticut's poorest neighborhoods, a brownfield was transformed into a multi-use recreational park with four basketball courts, three softball fields, practice fields for football and soccer, a volleyball court, a fenced playground, a pavilion, and an amphitheater.
- Among Clearwater, Florida's many successful brownfields projects is the redevelopment of a former gas station into a free health clinic that serves a disadvantaged community.

More recently, the site had been used by a metals processing company and an engraving/printing business. Funds from an EPA Assessment Demonstration Pilot awarded to Bridgeport, and an additional $75,000 from EPA's Targeted Brownfields Assessment Program, revealed toluene and chlorinated solvents in the groundwater.

Once local residents became aware that this site was being assessed and would be cleaned up for eventual reuse, the community became actively involved in the reuse decision process. Ultimately, the community support that emerged for Went Field's restoration came to be considered one of the project's greatest successes. Local residents, representatives from adjacent Elias Howe Elementary School and Bassick High School, municipal planning, police, and park departments, and non-profits like ASPIRA (an organization that supports Latino youth) and Groundworks Bridgeport (an organization that supports local redevelopment projects) were among those involved in the planning process. Local residents and group representatives attended public safety and update meetings, publicity events, and design charettes, and helped to determine what Went Field's reuse should be.

Went Field's $4.4 million cleanup and redevelopment was funded through city bond funds, a community fundraising effort, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the National Park Service, and the State of Connecticut's Departments of Environmental Protection and Community Development. This former brownfield has been transformed into a multi-use recreational park that features four basketball courts, three softball fields, practice fields for football and soccer, track and field elements, a volleyball court, a fenced playground, a pavilion, and an amphitheater. Elias Howe Elementary School now has a recreation area and Bassick High School has athletic practice fields for the first time. The park is always bustling with residents, and is often the location for community events. Tito Molino, of the West End Community Development Council, expressed that the success of this project has been a source of pride for the community. "If people feel they have some input and control on a project like this," Molino explained, "that plants a seed for the future."

Site Reuses Tailored to Community Needs

The Clearwater Brownfields Assessment Pilot target area, with approximately 220 potentially contaminated commercial, industrial, and residential properties located on more than 1,800 acres, has the distinction of being the first state-certified brownfields area in Florida. Among Clearwater's many successful brownfields restoration projects is the site of a former gas station that was transformed into a free health clinic to serve the residents of North Greenwood, the largest minority community in the city as well as one of the poorest.

Once EPA's Brownfields Pilot had performed assessments on the property, the State of Florida provided $200,000 for cleanup of underground storage tanks and contaminated soil. Another $320,000 from the state paid for construction of the new facility. Representatives of North Greenwood participated in redevelopment planning and voted unanimously for the city to lease the property for use as a non-profit clinic. North Greenwood residents now have the Greenwood Community Health Resource Center, a free health facility offering immunizations, physicals, tests and screenings, flu shots, and health counseling services.

The Greenwood Community Health Resource Center in Clearwater, Florida.

Significantly Boosting the Local Economy

Once a premier coastal port of the Pacific Northwest, the Thea Foss waterway in Tacoma, Washington, had become dilapidated and underused due to contamination from its past maritime activities. In 1991, the Tacoma City Council moved to acquire 27 acres of this contaminated land. Later, 15

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additional acres were purchased. By 1995, Tacoma had completed its investigations and plans for removing contamination from the city-owned waterway, but sources of funding for redevelopment remained uncertain. The city used its EPA Brownfields Pilot to help create the Thea Foss Waterway Public Development Authority (PDA), and to assist in generating a revitalization strategy. Ultimately, the Brownfields Pilot helped Tacoma to leverage the initial $63 million in redevelopment funding, the majority of which came from private sources.

That financing resulted in the Museum of Glass International Center for Contemporary Art, which is seen as the first step in an overall waterfront renewal plan devised by the PDA. Inspired by Tacoma native and renowned glass artist Dale Chihuly, the museum's distinctive, four-story cone now serves as a landmark for those entering the city. The 1.6-acre property consists of an exhibition space, a cafe, five outdoor installations, a gift shop, a "hot shop" where the public can view the process of glass blowing and cutting, and public access to the waterfront. The Pacific Northwest is the heart of glass country in the United States, and the museum appears to be a perfect fit.

The Chihuly Bridge of Glass seen from a distance in Tacoma, Washington.

The Brownfields Pilot also assisted Tacoma in leveraging an additional $6 million for the Chihuly Bridge of Glass, which was designed by Dale Chihuly and which opened with the museum in July 2002. Spanning 500 feet over I-705 and a rail line, the bridge connects the waterfront with downtown Tacoma and offers pedestrians access to newly redeveloped areas along the Thea Foss Waterway, showcasing exotic displays of Chihuly glass artwork along the way.

Museum marketers initially questioned whether anyone would come to Tacoma, a city with a reputation as Seattle's poor, blue-collar cousin. However, both the museum and the bridge were an instant success. Within the first six months more than 185,000 visitors came to the museum, contributing $17 million to the local economy; tourism agencies in nearby cities cannot keep up with the demand of people that want to travel to Tacoma. The museum and bridge have been called "an explosion of color" by The New York Times and "spectacular" by The Los Angeles Times. Adjacent to the Glass Museum, a new, $40 million, mixed-use development has been completed, and a $20 million, mixed-use renovation is nearing completion, both on former brownfields. Yet another, $60 million, mixed-use development that will feature a new hotel is expected to be completed in 2005. Through the efforts of the city and EPA, and with significant private-sector financial support, Tacoma has been able to turn the shore of the Thea Foss into a residential, commercial, and cultural public esplanade.

Sustaining the Philosophy of EPA's Brownfields Program

Success breeds continued success, and as the Brownfields Program builds sustainable redevelopment models, future projects have examples to follow. The Program's philosophy is to reflect a model of environmental protection that creates economically viable, environmentally sound, self-sustaining communities. Ensuring that brownfields redevelopment choices are sustainable is an essential component of that philosophy. By ensuring that reuses are environmentally sound while providing local residents with the greatest possible benefit, the Brownfields Program will continue to improve the quality of life in neighborhoods across the country and prevent the creation of future brownfields.

To find out more about sustainable brownfields redevelopment, visit EPA's Brownfields web site at http://www.epa.gov/brownfields or call EPA's Office of Brownfields Cleanup and Redevelopment at (202) 566-2777.